

**Merced Community College District  
NOTICE OF EXEMPTION**

To:  County Clerk  
Merced County  
2222 M Street  
Merced, CA 95340

Office of Planning and Research  
P.O. Box 3044, Room 113  
Sacramento, CA 95812-3044

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MERCEDE COUNTY PLANNING  
AND RESEARCH  
OFFICE

FILED

**From:** Merced Community College District, 3600 M Street, Merced, CA 95348

**Project Title:** Merced College Student Housing Project

**Project Location – Specific:** 3600 M Street (APN 230-010-006-000)

**Project Location - City:** Merced

**Project Location - County :** Merced

**Project Description:** The proposed project consists of the construction and operation of student housing on the Merced College campus for students in the School of Agriculture. The project would provide housing facilities for 30 students (8 rooms with two beds, 12 rooms with one bed, and two resident advisor rooms). Also included are communal restrooms, two communal kitchens with dining and pantry, two academic support and counseling lounges, laundry, office, entry/mudroom, an outdoor patio, and courtyard areas. The total gross building area is 7,410 square feet. The District is applying for grant funding through the student housing grant program established under SB 169.

**Name of Public Agency Approving Project:** Merced Community College District

**Name of Person or Agency Carrying Out Project:** Merced Community College District

**Exempt Status: (check one)**

- Ministerial Project (Section 21080(b)(1); 15268).
- Declared Emergency (Section 21080(b)(3); 15269(a))
- Emergency Project (Section 21080(b)(4); 15269(b)(c)).
- Categorical Exemption: Sections 15314 and 15332.
- Statutory Exemption (Code/Section \_\_\_\_\_).

**Reasons why the project exempt:**

The proposed student housing project qualifies for exemption from CEQA under two categorical exemption categories: Section 15314 - Minor Additions to Schools, and Section 15332 - In-Fill Development Projects.

Section 15314, Minor Additions to Schools: Class 14 consists of minor additions to existing schools within existing school grounds where the addition does not increase original student capacity by more than 25% or ten classrooms, whichever is less. The addition of portable classrooms is included in this exemption.

The proposed project consists of the construction and operation of housing facilities to serve 30 students on an existing community college campus and will not result in any

increase in student capacity on the campus. The housing is intended to be provided to students in the School of Agriculture.

Section 15332, In-Fill Development Projects: Class 32 consists of projects characterized as in-fill development meeting the conditions described in this section.

- (a) The project is consistent with the applicable general plan designation and all applicable general plan policies as well as with applicable zoning designation and regulations.

The Merced College campus is designated "School" on the Merced General Plan Land Use Map and zoned "R-1-6" (Low Density Residential). Colleges and trade schools are permitted in the R-1-6 zone with a conditional use permit. Continued use as an educational facility is consistent with all applicable general plan policies and longstanding zoning practice for public education facilities in Merced.

- (b) The proposed development occurs within city limits on a project site of no more than five acres substantially surrounded by urban uses.

The Merced College campus is within the city limits of Merced. The project will be constructed on approximately 1.1 acres located northeast of the Learning Resource Center and north of the mechanical agriculture facility. A large parking lot exists to the west of the site and the ag arena is located to the east. The college campus is adjacent to urban residential development to the west, south, and north, with nearby medical, commercial, and residential development to the east.

- (c) The project site has no value as habitat for endangered, rare or threatened species.

The project site is within the existing Merced College campus, which has existed at this location for 58 years. The campus consists of buildings, sidewalks, parking lots, turfed and landscaped areas, and campus agricultural land, and is substantially surrounded by urban development. Therefore, the site would not provide appreciable habitat for endangered, rare or threatened species.

- (d) Approval of the project would not result in any significant effects relating to traffic, noise, air quality, or water quality.

Traffic: The CEQA Guidelines provide that Vehicle Miles Traveled (VMT) is the most appropriate measure of transportation impacts. The Merced County Association of Governments (MCAG) *VMT Thresholds and Implementation Guidelines* (September 2022) provides screening criteria to determine whether projects may be presumed to produce a less than significant VMT impact. The MCAG guidelines indicate that a student housing project on a college campus is presumed to produce a less than significant VMT impact.

Noise: As with all building projects, there will be some construction noise, but the project site is not near any residential uses and the college would manage the construction of the project to have a minimal impact on existing college classroom operations.

Air Quality: The San Joaquin Valley Air Pollution Control District (Air District) has established thresholds of significance for criteria pollutant emissions, which are

based on the Air District's New Source Review (NSR) for stationary sources. Using the project type, size, and the number of vehicle trips, the Air District has pre-quantified emissions and determined values below which it is reasonable to conclude that a project would not exceed applicable thresholds of significance for criteria pollutants (Small Project Analysis Level [SPAL], November 2020). The threshold for low-rise apartment units (there is no category for student housing) indicates that up to 224 low rise apartment units, which generate less than 800 average daily trips, would not exceed applicable thresholds of significance for criteria pollutants. The proposed project includes 8 rooms with two beds, 12 rooms with one bed, and two resident advisor rooms, for a total of 22 rooms. This level of housing development is substantially under the low-rise apartment residential threshold of 224 units. In terms of trip generation, on-campus housing for 30 students would generate very little traffic as the students would live and eat on campus. Therefore, the project would not exceed applicable thresholds of significance for criteria pollutants. GHG emissions will be reduced and are not considered substantial due to the limited number of vehicular trips and by complying with the Air District rules and regulations and Title 24/CALGreen requirements in the construction of the project.

Water Quality: The Merced College campus drains into the City's storm drainage system and will be subject to National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System requirements. Water quality impacts, therefore, would be less than significant.


Based on the above, significant effects related to traffic, noise, air quality, and water quality are not anticipated.

- (e) The site can be adequately served by all required utilities and public services. Since the project is within the existing Merced College campus, all utilities and public services are available and already in place. According to District staff, the new housing can be adequately served with all required utilities and services.

The project does not meet any of the exemption exceptions specified in Section 15300.2 in that there is no appreciable cumulative impact associated with the project; the project would not have a significant effect on the environment due to unusual circumstances; the project will not result in damage to scenic resources within a state scenic highway; the project is not located on a hazardous waste site; and the project will not cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of a historical resource.

**Lead Agency Contact Person:** Marcus Metcalf

**Telephone:** (209) 384-6005

**Signature:**  **Date:** 6/15/23

**Title:** Senior Director of Capital Projects and Facilities